

Ludomythologies: myths in the present and of the present in contemporary games

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Keywords

Myths, Mythology, Games, Immanence, Transcendence

INTRODUCTION

The project presented here aims to analyze myths in games from a double perspective: as an update of a transcendent cultural heritage and as a mythical fabric shaped by ludic rituals and common affordances. This creates a mythology through which our culture negotiates its fears and concerns. Both areas are connected. We aim to show not only the validity of myths even in the most contemporary forms of culture, but also the constant creation of new mythical structures to make meaning from the world.

The continuity of cultural traditions throughout the centuries found one of its main vehicles for survival and consolidation in stories. Motifs, symbols, and structures tend to coincide in the history of different civilizations throughout time, generating a tendency towards cultural sedimentation that helps explain the origins of the world, the meaning of man, and eschatological speculation. Myths can be understood as stories about the exploits of supernatural beings (Eliade, 1999, pp. 13-14) transmitted through tradition and ritual (Kerényi and Jung, 2004, p.17), but also as "any story that can transcend, be repeated, give rise to new stories, or even be the origin of new myths." (Martínez García, 2017, p. 29).

The main hypothesis of the project is that myths, both from a transcendent perspective (myths in the present) and from an immanent one (myths of the present), have in games a space for ideological and narrative development that helps in understanding contemporary society.

The myths in the present configure the transcendental dimension of historical heritage and its reading in contemporaneity, where the mythical meaning and the return to the

Proceedings of DiGRA 2022

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essential questions of Humanity, its origin, and destiny stand out (Brunel, 1999). The great myths of the past reverberate in modern texts through a process of repetition (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) where myths close the circle that begins with archetypes, continues with themes, and is singled out in symbols (Losada, 2010).

The myths of the present establish the immanence of the foundational fact, the social, political and cultural bond that is conceived in reality as a new mythical genesis. From this perspective, myths can not only transit and mutate between historical periods but can also be born out of a specific context. This was the contribution that Barthes (1999) made when considering myth as an indeterminate and changing infinity of social representations based on a relationship of deformation.

Structuralist and culturalist approaches, even with their notable differences, allow myths to be perceived as a system of relations, an articulated combination of different elements that end up forming both a structure of meaning and a field of discussion between social and cultural agents. For this project we propose the study of the structural and/or cultural particularities of myths through mythanalysis, the methodological process proposed by figurative structuralism (Gutiérrez, 2012, p. 181) and, more specifically, by Gilbert Durand (1982).

Whereas myth-criticism seeks to study the work through its mythemes and "mythical settings" (Durand, 1982), myth-analysis seeks to discover "the patent or latent myths that go through, 'work', or sustain a certain cultural moment" (Gutiérrez, 2012, p. 183). Mythanalysis, as a methodological tool, allows us to carry out a study of myths in games in its aforementioned double nature, in and of the present.

From the perspective of myths in the present, the few approaches that have been made from Game Studies have done so through the analysis of games whose theme is literally mythological (Cassar, 2013), so there is little research specifically focused on the mythical character of games. There are brief approaches to analogue games (García and Del Canto Nieto, 2019), to the context of production in the conformation of myths (Todor, 2010), or to the generation of new mythical worlds from previous elements (Guyker, 2016; Galanina and Salin, 2016; Galanina and Baturin, 2020).

From the perspective of the myths of the present, we see how the repeated use of motifs from our time, such as recurring actions and motivations, ends up creating a structural substrate with potential of a mythical nature. Contemporary games recurrently incorporate the fears and concerns of our time. The climate crisis, pandemics, refugees, citizenship, populism and totalitarianism, disability, the place of minorities, technological solutionism, or the collapse of socioeconomic structures are themes found in games from *The Last of Us* to *Bury Me, My Love*. This representation of pressing issues is sometimes only cosmetic, but it is often built upon repeated patterns of play and design, archetypal mechanics, minimal game units, and storytelling.

The relevance of games as a mass medium and as a space of social and cultural conflict is linked to the tradition of the mythical story as a massive and popular abstract structure and, in turn, as a semantic concretion of contemporaneity, where the great values of society are agreed upon, discussed, and fought.

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